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Swiss Agency for Development
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Nachdiplomstudium für Entwicklungsländer
Centre for Development and Cooperation

Results Based Project Cycle Management
A vade mecum for people in development and cooperation

Module 5

Evaluation or Review of Results

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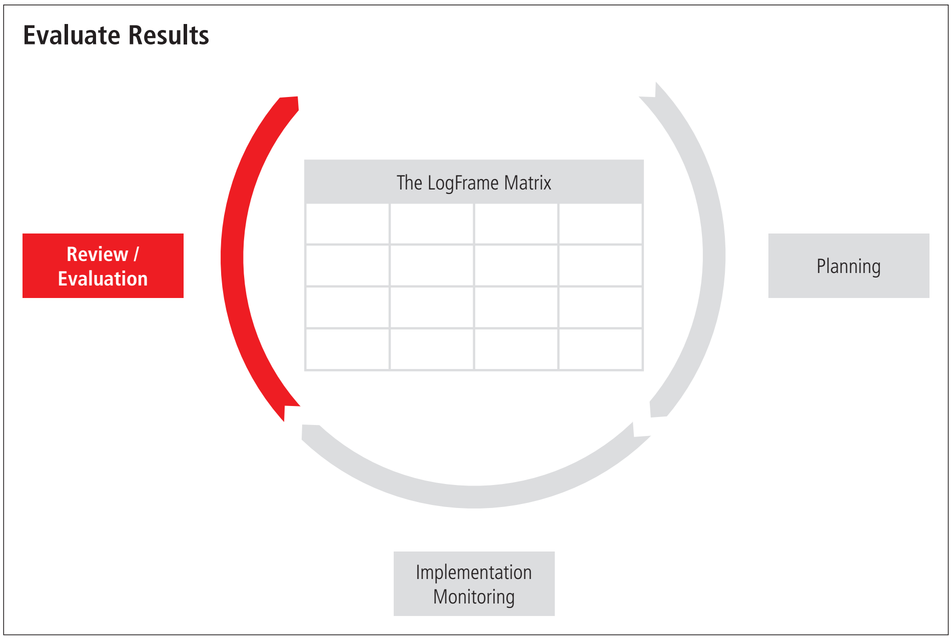
1 Introduction



> However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.
> Winston Churchill

Evaluation implies improvement as well as doubt. Those who believe that they know everything and that everything is perfect, need no evaluation. Those who have doubts, who want to improve and admit that contexts and needs change, that errors happen, that they are accountable for the use of resources, or that their experience could be of value to others, call for evaluation.

Evaluation is a term loaded with emotions – often negative ones. Does anyone ever like having their work assessed, judged, criticised or valued? At home it's the parents, at school the teachers, on the sports ground it's the coaches, our performance is constantly being critically assessed – always with the intention to educate us. Why do these good intentions leave us with negative feelings towards being assessed? Are their judgements not always correct and fair? Was some of their feedback not helpful because it seemed personal and not about concrete behaviour? Was it because we felt small and helpless? Evaluations often take place in unsymmetrical relationships. Whoever has power or is in a superior position is entitled to inspect and assess his subordinates. Or those who provide the money are entitled to evaluate those who receive it. No doubt, in development cooperation accountability is a must. The issue is how to avoid evaluation degenerating into detective work where one side searches for what they assume the other side is hiding. Or expressed in positive terms, how do we see to it that evaluations become undertakings that foster professionally sound project cycle management, accountability, understanding and learning – and thus contribute to increased impact of the project under scrutiny.

The large number of synonyms for evaluation – ranging from something as soft as "review" (to look at something again) to something as hard as "judgement" (emit a final verdict) indicates that evaluation is a rather fuzzy concept. This module intends to clarify concepts and to describe the purpose and the process of evaluations and reviews. Like the whole script this module is primarily based on the terminology and practice of SDC.

2 Definition and Professional Standards

Evaluation compliments monitoring as a steering instrument. Although they both serve the same purpose, accountability and learning are of different natures and cannot replace each other. Evaluation digs deeper under the surface and is done at specific moments only, while monitoring is a continuous activity done at regular intervals. Usually the timing of evaluations is pre-defined in the project document. Most often we conduct evaluations at the end of a phase, sometimes in the middle. With a few exceptions monitoring is a project internal activity whereas many evaluations and reviews are done or facilitated by external experts. Good monitoring provides reliable data for the evaluation. On the other hand sometimes evaluations are unrealistically expected to patch up poor monitoring. Many times evaluations are overloaded with questions and expectations. As they are quite costly sources of in-depth information, it is better to use them only for gaining information and appreciation we cannot get otherwise at a better price.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.
Carl Sagan

OECD/DAC defines evaluation as "the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should also provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors."

The two adjectives "systematic" and "objective" have some implications. A suitable synonym for "systematic" could be "methodical" in the sense of professional procedures. In social science "objectivity" is a concept in dispute. What can be done to obtain less biased, more independent and fairer judgements?

Professional evaluation observes the difference between measurement and assessment. When a doctor takes a pulse and a temperature, he is measuring. Based on a faster pulse and higher temperature, the observation of a runny nose and the complaints of muscle pain the doctor concludes that the patient has the flu. The doctor made an assessment, which in health sciences is called a diagnosis. In PCM we use the terms evaluation and review for assessing projects based on evidence obtained through direct measurement, observation or surveys.

As important decisions about the future of projects are often based on the results of evaluations, they must meet high professional standards. The Swiss Evaluation Society SEVAL groups their 27 standards into four categories:

Utility	The evaluation is focussed on the information needs of the envisaged users of the evaluation.
Viability	The evaluation is conducted in a realistic, well-planned, diplomatic and cost conscious manner.
Propriety	The evaluation is conducted in a legally and ethically correct way, and pays due attention to the wellbeing of those involved in and affected by the evaluation.
Accuracy	The evaluation produces and disseminates valid and comprehensible information.

3 Types of Evaluations

> Supposing is good,
> but finding out
> is better.
> Mark Twain

Many newcomers feel confused by the many types of evaluations, assessments, reviews and appraisals that are mentioned in the documents of different donor agencies. Classifying these terms helps to get a better feeling for what evaluation is about. In the classification below we limit ourselves to four criteria. Some commonly used terms do not fit into these classifications and are added at the end of the table.

Timing	**Ex-ante appraisal** is done before the project implementation or even before the project approval. It assesses the relevance and the intervention logic as well the feasibility and the efficiency of a proposed intervention. **Mid-term evaluation** is conducted during a project cycle. It is especially useful for finding out to what extent a project has performed according to plan, how changes in the context have negatively influenced the progress and what adjustments are indicated. **Final evaluation** is undertaken towards the end of a project or a project phase. We use it to draw conclusions and recommendations for the next phase. Final evaluations are often given the task of appraising achievements. **Ex-post evaluation** is mandated more or less long after the completion of a project. It is especially suited for assessing factors of success and failure as well as intermediate outcomes, possible impacts and their sustainability.
Purpose	**Formative evaluation** is intended to foster learning and improve performance. **Summative evaluation** aims at accountability for the outputs and outcomes achieved.
Focus	**Process evaluation** focuses on how a specific project or implementing organisation works: policies, service delivery, and management. **Project evaluation** examines one single intervention with its defined cause-effect framework, the strategy applied and the achievement obtained. **Program evaluation** looks at sets of projects at country, regional or global level in the same sector. The intention is to find out how the projects contribute to the achievements of higher-order-objectives. **Country strategy evaluation** assesses the contribution of the entire intervention to the development of a partner country and the management of the country program. **Thematic evaluation** studies a specific strategically important topic. It examines experiences in different countries, regions and sectors.
Responsibility	**Internal review** is organised and managed by the project team – in coordination with the its counterpart in the Coordination Office. Often this kind of evaluation focuses on specific processes and outcomes and is characterised by high levels of participation of the stakeholders. A related term is **self-evaluation.** **External evaluation** is commissioned by the donor and conducted by an entity outside the donor and implementing organisations. A special case of is the **joint evaluation,** which is financed by several donors and conducted under the responsibility of one or more of them. **Independent evaluation** is mandated by an entity outside the control of those responsible for the design and implementation of the development intervention. In many organisations this is either the department Controlling or Quality Assurance.
Other Types	**Peer Review** is an assessment by independent, external persons "with equal standing". The main purpose is learning and quality improvement. **Rigorous or Impact Evaluation** compares the outcomes against a counterfactual that shows what would have happened to beneficiaries without the project. Unlike other types of evaluation, it permits the attribution of changes by experimental and quasi-experimental designs. **Meta-evaluation** reviews and aggregates findings from several related evaluations. Some use the term to denote the evaluation of an evaluation to judge its quality and/or assess the performance of the evaluators.

The table above does not fully reflect the terminology of SDC. In their case only those assessments that are mandated and managed by the Controlling Section receive the generic term "evaluation"; those mandated and controlled by the operational lines (programme officers at Head Office or Coordination Office) are called "Review".

Within SDC four different organisational structures play specific roles in evaluations and reviews:

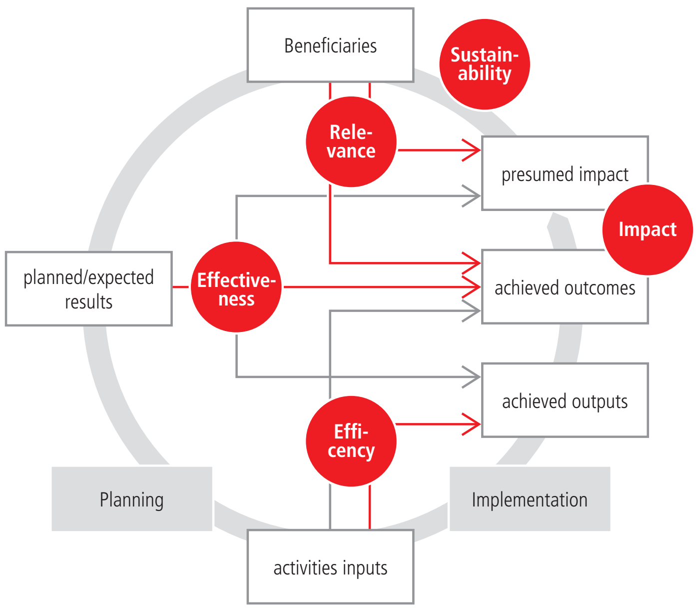
Directorate	**Evaluation and Controlling Division (SC)**
• Approves guidelines • Commissions evaluations through SC • Accounts for management response to evaluations	• Commissions evaluations • Issues SDC evaluation standards • Supports QA in in-house training on evaluation
Quality Assurance Division (QA)	**Operational Lines (OP)**
• Issues PCM guideline • Supports result orientation of projects • Supports OP in the conduction of reviews	• Commission reviews • Support SC in conducting evaluations • Participate in Core Learning Partnerships

This module puts its main emphasis on reviews, because evaluations are mandated by the small group of staff in the Controlling Section, whereas reviews are commissioned by a large number of staff in the operational lines. Many concepts are the same and the process is similar, although the terminology is quite different. As "evaluation" is a common, popular term for assessing projects, we use it as such and therefore also as a synonym for the term "review". When we make reference to evaluation in the sense of SDC terminology, we will indicate it.

4 Evaluation Criteria

In evaluation/review we apply exactly the same criteria as for project planning, because they are the core elements of Result based Management. That does not mean that in each and every review all five DAC criteria plus the criteria for the transversal themes have to turn up. The key to successful reviews is the conscious selection of the really relevant evaluation criteria and the formulation of the pertinent questions. Evaluation is digging holes in designated spots and not ploughing large fields.
In module 1 we present the definitions of OECD-DAC: efficiency, effectiveness, impact, relevance and sustainability. The illustration below shows their placement in our model of Result based Management.

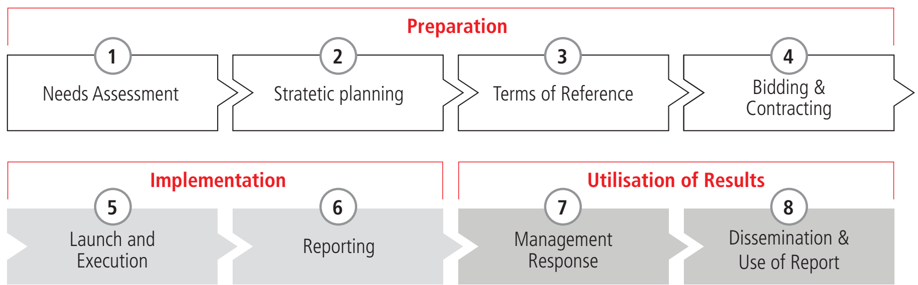
The DAC Criteria



5 Process of External Review

Reviews and evaluations are key events in the life cycle of any project. Like in any other type of assessment, just the announcement of a review can create and aggravate tensions, and cause unrealistic expectations and fears. To obtain more standardised and professional evaluations, many organisations define a standard process in their quality management system.
It is common sense to group the stages of the process under the three headings preparation, implementation and utilisation of results following the chronological order of before, during and after. The whole process only fully makes sense if we follow it through to the very end. The best evaluation is of little value, as long as the project does not implement the steering decisions depicted in the so-called Management Response.

Main Stages of the Review Process



The implementation of results always also depends on the acceptance of the activity and its results. Although external reviews are commissioned from outside or above (head office or coordination office) and are carried out by independent consultants, an early information of project staff and stakeholders and transparency about the process and its aims help to create positive feelings towards the review and to increase ownership.

5.1 Needs Assessment

The preparation of a review starts well in advance, ideally a year before the scheduled date. Under time pressure it might be difficult to discuss the focus and scope of the review with the important partners and stakeholders. Moreover on short notice it is not easy to find good consultants.
Even when the ProDoc foresees a review and the budget is available, the preparation of a review starts with a serious justification of the exercise:

- Why is the review necessary?
- Who will read and use the review?
- What do we – the donor(s) and the implementer(s) – need to know about the project?
- What are the interests of our partners and of the possibly very heterogeneous group of stakeholders?

The most important thing about assessment is that it promotes dialogue among stakeholder.
unknown

These questions are answered in close consultation with the project implementer and stakeholders. Different stakeholder and users of the report might expect reliable information for different purposes such as:

- Donor: Decisions regarding scaling up, phasing out and development of country strategy; know-how exchange with similar projects; best-practice models for policy dialogue and donor coordination.
- Management: Project steering, redirecting, etc.
- Public relations and fundraising: Success stories and attractive case studies for media work, reports and project applications etc.

The selection of the type of evaluation is also a question of resources:

- Are (baseline) data available from the monitoring system to satisfy the users' needs with well-substantiated information?
- How much money is available and is it enough for coming up with valid and comprehensible information?

Usually it is a bad idea to cut cost by reducing the time the consultant's need, as searching for valid and reliable in-depth information is time-consuming. In the case of insufficient resources it is better to adjust the focus than to reduce time of the consultant. If the need assessment does not promise a reasonable added value, it is better to cancel this (expensive) exercise. We could replace the external review for instance with an internal review or by an in-depth study of a specific issue.

5.2 Strategic Planning

"Form follows function." This design principle of Louis Sullivan is also true for the strategic planning of evaluations. Only when we are clear about the purpose of the review, its users and timing in the life cycle of the project, can we make decisions regarding the content, methods and means.

> In doing we learn.
> George Herbert

Purpose: The choice is between summative and formative or in other words between "accountability" and "learning". If we prioritise accountability, the evaluators will typically look at outcomes, add up and document them and compare them with the out-comes defined in the LogFrame. The main questions start with "WHAT". If the review spotlights learning, we look at processes and the context. The evaluators will explore those factors that have contributed to or hampered the success. In this case the main questions start with "WHY" and "HOW".

Review and Evaluation

The choice is hardly ever between learning or accountability, but a matter of on which side we put the emphasis. This partly depends on the timing. Many mid-term reviews tend to focus primarily on learning; meanwhile expost evaluations or reviews at the end of a project often shed light on the effects. Reviews at the end of a phase often assess achievements and devise lessons learnt for the next phase regarding objectives and processes.
Ideally a review asks the following four questions:

1. To what extent have the expected changes taken place? (accountability)
2. Which factors enhanced or hindered change? (learning and steering)
3. How and how much did the project contribute to the changes? (contribution analysis for accountability and learning)
4. Why would such a project also work elsewhere? (learning)

How much the review can focus on accountability issues depends on the availability of data. Without baseline data and a proper monitoring system it is very difficult to measure change and even more difficult to appraise the concrete contributions of the project to that change. Without also having a solid data base learning is problematic: How will external experts be able draw conclusions and derive lessons learnt without knowing the facts?

Scope, Focus – Evaluation Criteria and Questions: A clear notion of the purpose of the review and of the needs of the users helps us to define the scope and the focus.

The scope defines the boundaries of the review in terms of objectives and activities to be addressed, the time period and the geographical area. Defining the scope is like fencing the area that we plan to investigate.

The focus describes which criteria need to be addressed. The evaluation criteria could be considered the posts and the evaluation questions as the fencing between the posts. They are the key elements of the whole undertaking. Whoever gets the wrong answers may have been asking the wrong questions.

But where do we get good questions from and what do good evaluation questions look like? The following five-step procedure produces satisfactory results:

> To be able to ask a question clearly is two-thirds of the way to getting it answered.
> John Ruskin

1. Define the criteria: The five DAC criteria are the starting point. In most cases we can eliminate some and replace them by other relevant criteria for the specific project.
2. Collect as many potentially important questions as possible: We begin with our own questions as incharge of the project. The main sources are the project document, project reports and the need assessment. We may also consult sector specific evaluations and handbooks. Like in brainstorming the quantity of questions is a crucial pre-requisite for quality questions.
3. Reduce the number of questions: Too many questions for too short a period of time bring about superficial answers. For each question we need to ask ourselves:
   - Can we not derive a satisfactory answer from the monitoring system?
   - Would the scope of the evaluation be seriously limited without this question?
4. Rephrase the questions: We must make sure that each question is specific and precise. It should be open and at the same time well focussed. Ask closed questions only when you expect a clear-cut YES or NO. The challenge with each question is to open up a defined space within the fenced area.
5. Field-test the evaluation questions: We can try the questions out on colleagues to see to what extent the questions invite people to talk about the expected subject.
6. Finalise the list of questions.

Millions saw
the apple fall,
but Newton
was the one
who asked why.
Bernard Baruch

Below we show some sample review questions for the five DAC criteria and other selected criteria commonly used in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

Criterion	Questions
Impact	Which positive, lasting effects and behavioural changes can be perceived? Which unexpected and unintended positive or negative side effects have happened?
Relevance Did the project do the right things?	How consistent are the achieved effects with the needs of the beneficiaries and the requirements of the country? How consistent are the activities and outputs with the intended effects?
Effectiveness	To what extent have the planned results been achieved? Which major factors have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the expected results?
Efficiency Did the project do the things right?	To what extent were the results achieved on time and with a minimum of resources? Which alternative approaches might have lead to similar results at lower cost?
Sustainability	Which evidence indicates that the achieved effects will continue after the completion of the project? Which major factors might enhance or hamper the persistence of the achieved effects?
Alignment	How well does the project complement or underpin the plans and policies of the partner country and the activities of other donors? In which aspects does the intervention make use of and strengthen country structures?
Result Chain / Framework	What are the differences between the results framework depicted in the LogFrame and the actual logic behind project intervention? Which assumptions in the LogFrame held true and which mitigation measures work?
Connectedness	What has been done to facilitate the bridging between the short-term relief and recovery activities and the long-term development? Which local capacity, able to respond to future incidents, has been develop during relief and recovery operations?
Coverage	Who has been supported by the humanitarian action and why? How are relief operations coordinated with other organisations in order to maximise coverage? How (fairly) do the relief operations deal with equity issues like gender, age, ability and ethnicity?
Coherence	How compatible are the (intended) project results with the policies of the donor agency? Which synergies and frictions with other interventions of the same organisation does the project cause?

Evaluation methods: At this point of the strategic planning of the review we have to consider methodological aspects, although it is up to the consultants to specify in their offers how they will carry out the evaluation. We do this for several reasons:

- Methods imply time, and time is money.
- Methods give us an idea about the process of the evaluation and possible organisational constraints.
- Methodology will be an important criterion for appraising the offers.

Partners and resource persons: To get fair judgments and to minimise bias, we have to carefully plan whom we involve in the review. As a general rule we triangulate information. That means we try to get answers to the same question from at least three different sources or perspectives.

5.3 Terms of Reference

The results of the strategic planning are packed into the Terms of Reference (TOR). Additionally the TOR contain information about operational aspects. They are the key document for consultations with the stakeholders as well as for the bidding and contracting process.

Structure of TOR
1. Purpose of the evaluation 2. Background information and context 3. Scope and focus of the evaluation, incl. evaluation questions 4. Evaluation process and methods 5. Deliverables 6. Documentation 7. Schedule and time budget 8. Competency profile of the evaluators 9. Budget

Purpose: Disclose the reasons why you have mandated the evaluation at this point in time.

Context/background: The TOR are the basis of the bidding process. Consultants without previous knowledge of the project should also be able to understand where the project is located and what it is about. Without this basic understanding they can hardly prepare a tailor-made offer.

Scope/focus: The TOR include all criteria and evaluation questions. This is so that the consultants can include the methods with which they plan to deal with these criteria in their offer.

Process/methods: The methods are the instrument of the consultants. Like good artisans competent consultants can skilfully handle a great variety of instruments. Unless we have very good reasons to oblige the use of certain methods, we permit methodological freedom. In so doing the consultants are fully responsible for the process and accountable for the result of the review. If we force them to use certain instruments, we have to be ready to take at least a part of the blame for possible methodological weaknesses.

Deliverables: In the case of reviews, deliverables are the different kinds of "papers" we expect from the consultants. Any evaluation has to produce at least a final report. In stage 6 – Reporting – we describe its structure and length.

In a complex project we could ask for an inception report, which is produced in the first days of the evaluation and helps to ensure that the evaluators are on track and have correctly understood the task. When the evaluation is not being done all at once a so-called interim report documents the progress so far. Other common deliverables are minutes of workshops, slides used for debriefing, and case studies. Often they are attached to the final report. The TOR list and define the expected deliverables.

Documentation: When consultants prepare the bid, they need to know the kind and especially the volume of the project documentation they have to revise and from whom and when they get which documents (headquarters or project). On the other hand the selection of the documents is a good opportunity for clearing out the shelves and updating the project documentation.

Schedule and time budget: Evaluations are time consuming events not only for the project, but for all those involved. Although most people are pleased to cooperate in interviews and workshops, it is their valuable time. When we schedule an evaluation, we must respect their time constraints. In rural areas the weather and agricultural seasons are to be considered. It is also worthwhile to check the calendar with the project partners for (local) holidays such as Thet, Dashain or the Holy Week. These considerations have to be included into the overall time budget.

Competency profile of the evaluators: The quality of an evaluation depends very much on the competence of the evaluator(s). How many people should the evaluation team compose of? Do we need technical or methodological expertise? Does gender matter? Do we engage national and/or international consultants? Certainly money is a selection criterion, but it should not be the only one. National consultants know the context well. In many places international consultants have a better standing. If learning is the purpose of the evaluation, we might look for technical expertise. If our intention is assessing the achievement of results, we might like to assure methodological competence, because the most common defence against evaluation reports with unsatisfactory achievements is to question the methodology.

Budget: The (time) budget defines how many person-days are given for studying the documentation, execution (field visits), reporting etc. The expenses for national or international consultants might make a considerable difference regarding daily fees and travel expenses. Other expenses to be calculated include: Translating, workshops with stakeholders, debriefing session with partners, etc. The TOR are the last phase in preparing for the full budget of the evaluation, but usually only the expenses are disclosed in the TOR, which the consultants need to know in order to write up their offer.

5.4 Bidding and Contracting

Depending on the size of the review, the mandate is awarded directly or through a tender. In the first case we select the consultant(s), maybe by using a tool like the "Checklist Evaluators" below. Then we ask them to write a concrete offer along the line of the TOR, which is discussed and assessed again based on a tool like the "Checklist Offers" below.
In the case of a tender, the Call for Offers and the TOR are published on the website or suitable consultants are personally invited to present an offer. Tenders have a defined deadline. Ideally we first assess the offers anonymously in a team and only afterwards look at who is behind each offer.

Checklist Offers	3	2	1	0
The offer is well structured.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The methodology suits the evaluation questions.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Important questions are triangulated.	☐	☐	☐	☐
TOR are critically reviewed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The budget is reasonable and sufficient for fulfilling the task.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The operational plan is realistic.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Checklist Evaluators	3	2	1	0
Are sufficiently independent.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are technically competent and experienced.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are credible for the implementers of the recommendations.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Present positive references from earlier mandates.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Have extra abilities regarding language, context and subject.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The operational plan is realistic.	☐	☐	☐	☐

After signing the contract we hand over of the full documentation, usually consisting of planning documents and relevant reports.

5.5 Launch and Execution

Between the briefing at the beginning of the evaluation and the debriefing at the end, the consultants are in charge of the evaluation process. During the whole duration of the exercise the team keeps the project and the commissioner of the review informed about the progress of the evaluation. At the same time, the commissioner and the project staff support the process by making the necessary contacts and by providing logistics.

Briefing: The purpose of the briefing – the first step of the implementation stage – is to establish rapport and to develop a common understanding between the commissioner of the evaluation and the evaluation team. Depending on the situation it either takes place at the head office, the coordination office or the project office. Often there are two briefings: The first one at head or coordination office deals mainly with strategic aspects of the evaluation and the second one on the premises of the project with strategic and operational and logistic aspects.

The briefing is the most appropriate moment for recalling and discussing ethical issues like gender, cultural aspects, protection of rights of those participating in the review and the importance of confidentiality for the informants.

Last in the briefing the review team presents a comprehensive plan and how it will deal with the key questions of the review. The plan could have the following format:

Key Question	Methods for data collection and processing	Source	Remarks (sample size etc.)
1.			

At the end of the briefing the detailed schedule is finalised and the very last documents are handed over.

Familiarisation: Although getting acquainted with the region starts before the field mission, it still takes some time after their arrival before the consultants are fully operational. A helpful attitude in the project staff before the arrival as well as the provision of good living and working conditions help to shorten the time of familiarisation.

Organisation of the team: It is a good investment to take some time for team building. Clarity about the roles and responsibilities within the review team and a smart division of work enhances efficiency and frees up time for discussing findings and for drawing conclusions and recommendations. This additional time can be used for looking into unforeseeable problems. Sometimes intercultural misunderstandings complicate the cooperation among the local and international consultants or between the review team and the project staff. One important rule is that differing opinions within the team are acknowledged in the report. It is not always necessary that the team reaches a consensus.

Schedule: There is always a temptation to overcrowd the schedule as there are so many people to talk to and so many places to visit. Underestimating distances and traffic conditions can be other causes for running short of time. Local traditions such as paying a visit to the village elders can take much more time than expected. The result of too tight a schedule might be that we lack time for in-depth discussions with stakeholders and beneficiaries or within the evaluation team. Be prepared for the unexpected as the unexpected always occurs!

Data Collection: Usually data collection is the most time consuming part of an evaluation, especially when the project does not have a well-structured monitoring system that provides reliable data. Through "Knowing" their own project well, many project teams are rather casual in updating data in the official project archives.

A great variety of methods or tools exist for collecting additional information and finding answers to the evaluation question based on evidence. The secret of expert reviewers is the selection and skilful application of the most appropriate methods. Although the methods to be applied were specified in the offer, during the execution of the evaluation it is important to be able to react flexibly to new information and circumstances.

Categorising the methods can take place by the basic mental processes involved or by the types of interaction: Reading, observing, questioning and measuring.

Method / Description	
1. Document research	Economic and efficient way of obtaining information, but maybe weak regarding validity and reliability, owing to little control over the quality of the documents.
2. Observation	Involves field visits and inspections to understand processes, services, infrastructure and their utilisation. Depends on the interpretation of the observers.
3. Interview with key informants	Flexible, in-depth approach, which is easy to organise and implement. Risk of biased presentation from informants and biased interpretation from interviewer(s).
4. Group interviews	Low-cost and efficient, and allows direct contact with people involved in the project. Prone to manipulation, especially in hierarchical settings.
5. Informal survey	Quantitative surveys of small samples. Rapid, but risk of sampling errors. Therefore be cautious with generalisations.
6. Formal survey	Oral interview or written questionnaires in a representative sample. Produces reliable data, but data collection is time-consuming and costly.
7. Story telling	Obtaining participants experiences, by listening to their stories. Often a culturally adapted way of communication, but sometimes difficult to interpret. Risk of sampling error.
8. Case studies	In-depth review of one or a small number of selected cases. Useful for understanding processes and formulating hypotheses to be tested later. Risk of sampling error.
9. Direct measurement	Registration of quantifiable or classifiable data by means of analytical instruments. Registers only facts, but does not provide explanation. Accurate if observers are well trained.

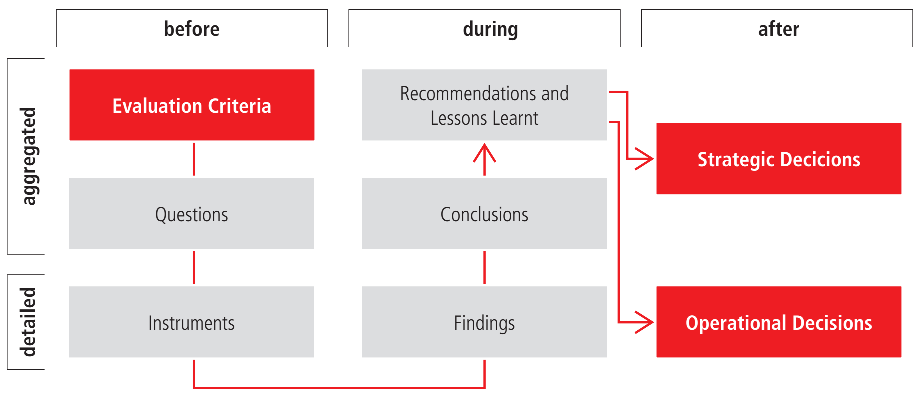
The pure and
simple truth
is rarely pure
and never simple.
Oscar Wilde

Processing and validation of data and information: Each evaluation has the task of establishing facts, appraising them, drawing conclusions and coming up with recommendations. That means in a short period of time a large bulk of data has to be condensed and generalised. Therefore it is very tempting to draw conclusions based on very little quantitative or qualitative "data". Triangulation – looking for at least three sources or applying at least three different methods – helps to avoid falling into this trap.
In the **Debriefing** at the end of the field mission the consultants present the preliminary results to the commissioner, the project implementer and representatives of other stakeholders. It is an opportunity for clarifying factual mistakes, for filling in gaps, for revising findings and conclusions as well as for testing the acceptance of the envisaged recommendations.
In this debriefing the consultants recall the evaluation questions and give an overview of the process and the methodology. They present their main findings and conclusions. The team also discusses possible shortcomings and methodological weaknesses. It is good practice to seek a first feedback from those reviewed. At the end the team presents the schedule for the finalising of the report.
The debriefing meeting is an excellent opportunity to foster ownership and prepare the people for possible changes. Therefore it is important to recognise the achievements and positive aspects, and to present the critical findings and conclusions in a relaxed, unassuming style.

5.6 Reporting

The report is the final product of the review. It describes why and how the review was done as well as the findings, conclusions and recommendations. It is in this document that decisions regarding the future of the project are made. The core of a good report is pertinent recommendations derived from convincing conclusions, which are based on credible facts and evidences.

From Criteria to Decisions



Many organisations have defined their template for evaluation reports, which prescribes a specific structure of the report. Here we describe a simple structure that follows the logic of the illustration above.

Executive Summary explains briefly the purpose and process of the review, describes the main findings and conclusions and lists the recommendations for decision makers. A good executive summary encourages the reader to read the whole report.

Structure of Report

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Executive Summary
1. Introduction
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4. Conclusions
5. Recommendation and Lessons Learnt
Annexes

Introduction describes the purpose of the review, its focus and scope and gives an overview of the methodology and instruments applied.

Description of the Project portrays the context of the project, the intervention logic (LogFrame), project organisation and important partners and stakeholders.

Findings present the facts and evidence in relation to the evaluation questions specified in the TOR.

Conclusions assess the results achieved by the project against the expected results specified in the LogFrame and discuss the appropriateness of the intervention logic.

Recommendations and Lessons Learnt are proposals to decision makers for improving the project and depict possible innovations for the country strategy and for sector strategies.

Annexes contain the TOR, the complete list of stakeholders and other informants consulted, a detailed description of the review process, including data sources and possible methodological weaknesses and limitations.

> I have made this letter longer than usual, because I lack the time to make it shorter.
> Blaise Pascal

Report writing towards the end of the mission is a race against time, unless at the beginning of the review we organise the reporting process well by clearly assigning the responsibilities. During the mission it is a good investment of time to constantly document the review process and products by collecting documents and taking photos. Before the team leaves the project, we should check the status quo of the report writing and agree who will deliver what. Experience shows that as soon as the airplanes have taken off and people have returned to their own countries, memories start fading and the communication among the review team members decreases.

Usually the TOR define the deadlines for turning in the draft and the final report. Between the two reports the commissioner of the project (sometimes in consultation with the stakeholders and the implementing organisation) gives a detailed feedback in writing. It is up to the consultants to decide which observations and comments they integrate into the final version of the report, as it is their names on the cover of the report. It is advisable to set short deadlines for the reporting process as well as for the Management Response as the paper loses relevance day by day.

Checklist for Assessing the Quality of Review Reports		Remarks
1. Report complete and well structured.	✓	
2. Language clear and concise.	✗	
3. Evaluation questions convincingly answered.	✓	
4. Findings based on facts/evidences and presented comprehensively.	✓	
5. Conclusions derived logically from findings.	≈	
6. Recommendations pertinent and addressed to decision makers and those who should implement them.	≈	

Simple checklists like the one above are useful tools for appraising the quality of reports. Of course, some organisations also have much more elaborate checklists.

5.7 Management Response

When we appraise the report and especially when we draft the management response, it is good to keep in mind that an evaluation or a review does not provide the "truth", regardless of the quality of the consultants. A review only provides an outside view and an expert judgement, the one and only truth about a project does not exist.

Each review report must receive a so-called Management Response, in which the entity that commissioned the review reacts officially on the report. Without Management Response we run the risk that the report disappears in a drawer and does not become part of the institutional memory. There are other good reasons why Management Response was made compulsory:

- Accountability: With the Management Response the commissioning organisation acknowledges or rejects its responsibility for specific results of the review and shows its commitment by disclosing the measures it will take as a consequence.
- Steering: The higher management of the commissioning organisation needs information about the quality of the review, the relevance of the results, the decisions taken at project level and decisions proposed at institutional level.
- Transparency: The stakeholder of the project and those involved in the review – including the consultants – have the right to know how the donor, who commissioned the review, appraises the review and what the consequences of it will be.

Although it is the official response of the donor, it is common practice to consult key stakeholders during the elaboration of the Management Response. This fosters ownership and prepares the ground for implementing the decisions.

The Management Response is a brief document. It limits itself to a few of the most pertinent issues and gives a strategic orientation for the future. Typically it has the following content:

Indecision becomes decision with time.
unknown

- General appreciation of the review and of the correctness and usefulness of the results.
- Definite statements of acceptation or rejection of the report as such, and its specific conclusions and recommendations. In the case of recommendations that are rejected or will be implemented later, it is necessary to explain the reasons why.
- Decisions and corrective measures with assigned responsibilities. Whenever possible, a timetable for the implementation is added.

5.8 Dissemination and Use of Results

Indecision and delays are the parents of failure.
George Canning

Reviews are expensive undertakings in terms of money and the time of all involved parties. The dissemination and subsequently the use of the results for improving project performance are the reasons for doing a review. Therefore the dissemination strategy must be designed at an early stage and the whole process must be shaped in such a way that the likelihood of the acceptance and the use of the results is high. This goal will not be achieved if the dissemination of the results consists only of distributing the report to a limited group of insiders.

Dissemination starts with the question: for whom is the report or parts of the report and the decisions in the Management Response must know information, should know information or nice to know information. Certainly it is a must to discuss the report with the project implementer and the main stakeholders. In the case of cofinanced projects the financing partners get the report as well. Another group to consider as first priority are colleagues within the organisation who work in the same sector or same geographical area. In an increasing number of organisations the final report and the Management Response are published on their website.

A workshop with project staff and stakeholders can be a meaningful follow-up activity, in which the report is "read" together and different possible interpretations of the papers are shared. Key questions could be:

- Which are the main messages of the report and the Management Response regarding the planning and development of the project?
- What are the consequences of the recommendations and decisions for our main partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries?
- What would favourable conditions look like for implementing the changes?

For safeguarding the implementation of the results it is necessary to make them part of the ordinary PCM cycle. The implementation of the decisions should become part of the yearly planning and should be monitored and reported accordingly. In the case of end of phase reviews we would like to read in the End of Phase Report, ProDoc and Credit Proposal for the next phase, how the recommendations will be taken up.

When it comes to learning at institutional level and to sharing strategic decisions reports are not always the best means for disseminating the results of reviews. Inhouse learning events, presentations in conference, media conferences, articles in newsletters and in professional journals, etc. are more appropriate ways of sharing the process and results of the review. Only when we have digested the review by discussing it thoroughly, does the activity become experience and part of the knowledge of the organisation.

6 Concluding Remarks

Reviews are done for accountability and learning – to prove that the predicted results have been achieved, and to improve the performance of the project and of the whole organisation. Reviews are complex and often complicated exercises, because many people in different roles and with differing interests, expectations and fears are in-volved.
Swiss development organisations – governmental and non-governmental – are proud of their participatory approach and tradition. Evaluations and reviews – especially external evaluations and reviews – are the litmus test for this claim, because they take place in the stress field between top-down and bottom-up or outside and inside. How much and what kind of participation from the insider is possible without putting the necessary independence of the outside reviewers at risk?

Roles of Involved Parties

Stage	Commissioner	Consultants	Implementer	Stakeholders
1. Needs Assessment	lead	—	consult	consult
2. Strategic Planning	lead	—	consult	consult
3. Terms of Reference	lead	—	consult	consult
4. Bidding & Contracting	lead	offer	—	—
5. Launch & Execution	support	lead	support	cooperate
6. Reporting	—	lead	support	—
7. Management Response	lead	—	react	(consult)
8. Dissemination and Use of Results	lead	—	cooperate	cooperate

The process which we have described in this module and a clear distribution of roles, gives the structure that helps to reduce complexity, to enable participation and to minimise unnecessary complications. However, reviews will never be easy, because from a methodological point of view it is challenging to assess the performance of projects in a sound way and come up with fair conclusions and recommendations strictly based on facts and evidence. Looking at the review process from a human point of view, the challenges are not lessened. Whether we like it or not, we touch on peoples' performance, their aspirations and self-doubts, their professional pride and effort. The more we are able to focus on the outputs and outcomes of their work and not on them as people, the better the chance that they will accept the review as an opportunity for learning and the review team as a sparring partner in their joint learning process.